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SUBJECT: THREE-MAN RACE EMERGES AFTER FIRST ROUND IN UNDP
PRIMARY

Classified By: POL Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Former Unification Minister Chung Dong-young was the big winner in the United New Democratic Party's four primary elections held over the weekend, placing first in three out of the four races. Former Gyeonggi Province Governor Sohn Hak-kyu came in second, despite his higher poll numbers; Lee Hae-chan, the only remaining "pro-Roh" candidate, was third, only slightly behind Sohn. The UNDP primaries conclude on October 14, with the Seoul primary.
End Summary

UNDP PRIMARY - ROUND ONE

¶12. (C) Former Unification Minister and two-time Uri Party Chairman Chung Dong-young emerged as the new frontrunner after the first round of the UNDP's touring primary with a convincing victory over poll-leader Sohn Hak-kyu and pro-Roh candidate Lee Hae-chan. Voting took place in Jeju and Ulsan on September 15, and North Choongchung and Gangwon on September 16. Twelve more votes will be held in the party's month-long primary. The last vote will be in Seoul on October 14 and the candidate will be announced October 15 at a party convention. Additionally, telephone polling to be held October 8-13 will supplement the voting results and will account for ten percent of each candidate's total. Political analysts speculate that Chung's surprising victory was due to his solid support base in the party. Chung was a cofounder and Chairman of the Uri Party, the UNDP's de facto predecessor. Chung placed first in Jeju, Ulsan, and North Choongchung, while finishing third in Gangwon.

MECHANICS

¶13. (C) The voting for the UNDP primary is the first election in Korea conducted with state-of-the-art electronic voting machines, so the results of each day's vote can be announced 10 minutes after the polling booths close. Several National Voting Officials at the Jeju voting booth told poloff there had been no instances of money-for-votes in the first round of the primary. Calling or text-messaging to encourage people to vote were likely occurring, but almost impossible to catch. The electorate for the primary is open and unlimited - if someone signs up to be in the electorate, they

then become a member of the Electoral College. In Seoul, there are already 500,000 signed up with the possibility of more joining. In addition, members of the Electoral College during the last four rounds of the primary from October 4 to 13 will be able to vote using their cellphones. The final part of the primary will be the telephone poll held from October 8-13. While the UNDP has succeeded in revamping the primary process, as did its predecessor Uri Party, for now the new style of voting has not captured the nation's imagination, as evidenced by such low voter turnout.

SOHN HAK-KYU

¶4. (C) Sohn Hak-kyu has consistently led all other liberal candidates in public opinion polls since his March 15 defection from the conservative GNP, but he fell short in the first weekend of voting for two reasons: his prior affiliation with the conservative Grand National Party (GNP) and his lack of focus on local support and organization. SNU Professor Chang Dal-joong, a college classmate of Sohn and one of Sohn's key advisors, told the DCM September 17 that Sohn expected his "message" would motivate voters and dismissed the need to focus on getting out the vote with buses and other local efforts. Sohn placed second in each of the four regional votes except Ulsan, where he finished fourth. Party members have been slow to back Sohn, reasoning that if Sohn could not beat Lee Myung-bak in the GNP primary (he was third when he withdrew in March), then he probably could not do it in the general election. There are rumors that Sohn may quit the race, but according to Chang, Sohn will stay in since he still is confident his anti-Roh, centrist message is the best and also expects strong support from the two most populous regions, Seoul and Gyeonggi

Province. Also, the telephone polls, which count for 10 percent of the total, should be favorable to Sohn, according to Chang.

PRO-ROH CANDIDATES UNITE

¶5. (C) Former Health and Welfare Minister and Roh confidante Rhyu Si-min received 18.5 percent of the votes on the first day of polling, coming in fourth out of four candidates. Since Rhyu's wife is from Jeju, he hoped to use a victory there to convince Lee Hae-chan to drop out and support him. However, when this did not happen, Rhyu immediately dropped out of the race and pledged his support to Lee Hae-chan at the Jeju vote-counting event. Rhyu is now Lee's campaign manager. On September 14, former Prime Minister Han Myeong-sook agreed to back Lee Hae-chan after losing out to Lee in polls to decide who should take the lead among the two. Lee finished third in Jeju and second in Ulsan on the first day, and third in Choongchung and first in Gangwon on the second day.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) If the UNDP is going to be competitive against the popular GNP frontrunner Lee Myung-bak, then they will have to generate some public interest. While that was one of the stated goals of the open, touring primary, pundits cited a less-than-20 percent turnout rate of the registered electorate as indicative of the lack of overall interest in the UNDP primary. UNDP officials claim that the recent typhoon and planning for the upcoming Chuseok holiday caused the low turnout, but most pundits speculate that the public has little interest in any of the UNDP candidates. Turnout could increase and is likely to, as the primary heads to more populous regions, but the real problem is getting the general electorate excited about any of the three remaining candidates. If the UNDP primary falls flat, dark horses such as independent candidate Moon Kuk-hyun and the Democratic

Party's candidate, to be decided October 16, could gain more support.
VERSHBOW